

CIA and Mercenary Air Forces

CIA and local Asian air forces are playing a growing role in the air war as the Administration seeks to minimize overt American involvement. There is abundant documentation pointing to the participation of these air forces in opium smuggling as well as in combat. (See Ramparts, 4/71 for a fuller account.)

Local Asian air forces--supplied, maintained and directed by American "advisors"--are doing an increasing amount of the bombing. The size of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) has increased dramatically, and the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF), and the Cambodian Air Force at slower rates. Although all the aircraft are piloted by Asians, Americans do everything else, from directing bomb loading to spotting for strikes.

Air America and Continental Airlines, privately owned, profit-making companies, operate under CIA direction and wage much of the supportive air war in Laos and Cambodia. The "charter" companies' planes perform troop transport and supply functions, spot for bombers, and engage in rescue operations for downed pilots. Air Force helicopters, helicopter gunships and giant C-130 cargo planes are "rented" to Air America for \$1 a year in Laos.

ASIAN AIR FORCES

American aid to VNAF, FY 1970-72: \$922 million
American aid to RLAF, FY 1970-72: \$128 million
(DoD, CR, 8/3/71)

"The Nixon Doctrine . . . was premised on the assumption . . . of increased U.S. military assistance."
(Undersecy. of State U. Alexis Johnson, FY 1972 DoD Authorization Hearings).

"An important factor in carrying out the Nixon Doctrine will be our military assistance program. We are requesting 48 million for development and 70.4 million for procurement of the International Fighter. In addition, we are requesting 10 million for initial spares. This aircraft is needed to provide an air defense capability for [our] Asian allies."
(Secy. of Air Force Robert C. Seamans, FY 1972 Senate DoD Appropriations Hearings)

Sen. Symington: "Are we going to continue to put these billions into Southeast Asia? Is that the overall plan in the U.S. today?"

Secy. Seamans: "For the foreseeable future we are going to continue to spend sizeable dollars in Southeast Asia."
(Ibid.)

VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE

"South Vietnamese military officers continue to deal in large quantities of heroin and to transport it around South Vietnam in military aircraft."

(Rep. Robert H. Steele, House Subcommittee on Europe, 7/7/71)

"The South Vietnamese Air Force is the sixth largest air force in the world."
(Michael Getler, Post, 1/14/72)

VNAF INVENTORY

Year	Fixed Wing Attack Aircr.	Heli- copters	Total, inc. Cargo, recon.
1/69	approx. 100	approx. 125	approx. 575
1/72	(total FW & heli. 750+)		1,000+
1/73*	300-400	500-600	1,200

*projected
(1969 and 1973 figures, Cornell study.
1972 figures, DoD)

VNAF PERSONNEL

1968:	20,000 (slightly under)
1972 (Jan.):	45,000
1973*:	50,000

*projected
(Ibid.)

VNAF ATTACK SORTIES

Year	Indochina	Laos	Cambodia
1968	2,250/mo.	none	none
1970	3,150/mo.	none	820
1971*	3,490/mo.	40	1,100

*as of July, 1971
(Cornell study)

"Mr. Seamans acknowledged that the Vietnamese 'will never be able to build the capability to do all that the United States Air Force has been doing in Laos. The Vietnamese Air Force . . . does not possess either B-52s or F-4s, the jet planes that do most of the trail bombing, and there are no plans,' Mr. Seamans said, 'to give it any.'"
(Craig Whitney, NYT, 12/6/71)